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AUTHOR Randall, Ruth E.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

A study examined the Adult Diploma Program (ADP), a project of the Minnesota High School Graduation Incentives Program, which gives 2 years of state aid to qualified learners to complete their requirements. Its purpose was to explore how persons enrolled in ADP find out about it, factors that led to making the decision to enroll in ADP, daily activities of learners enrolled in ADP, and what happened to persons after leaving the ADP. The main data collection procedure was ethnographic interviews with 15 learners currently enrolled in the ADP. These semistructured, face-to-face interviews identified the culture of ADP participants and generated answers to study questions. Students found out about ADP in a variety of ways, including community education, friends enrolled in the program, and through a mailed flyer. Students decided to enter the program because of a desire to finish high school, get a better job, and help their own children learn. Activities they reported included reading, working on the computer, writing, doing math, and studying geography. The most satisfying aspects of the program were the one-to-one instructional strategy and teacher-participant relationships. The students interviewed had just received their diplomas so they could not answer the question about experiences after leaving ADP. (Appendixes include a list of 22 references, questionnaire, student information sheet, and a conference presentation, "Minnesota Legislation on Choice: A Study of Learners in the St. Cloud, Minnesota, Adult Diploma Program" (Ruth E. Randall and Brian Bottge), that summarizes the study.) (YLB)

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A Study of the St. Cloud, Minnesota, Adult Diploma Program: A School Choice Program

Ruth E. Randall
Brian Bottge
Han Hua Wang

Minnesota Legislation on Choice: A Study of Learners in the St. Cloud, Minnesota, Adult Diploma Program

Ruth E. Randall
Brian Bottge

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A Study of the St. Cloud, Minnesota, Adult Diploma Program: A School Choice Program

by

Dr. Ruth E. Randall
Associate Dean and Professor
Teachers College
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

and

Dr. Brian Bottge
Director of Assessment
St. Cloud Community Schools
St. Cloud, Minnesota

and

Han Hua Wang
Graduate Student
Department of Educational Administration
Teachers College
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

A Study of the St. Cloud, Minnesota, Adult Diploma Program:
A School Choice Program

"Human beings are designed for learning" (Senge, 1990). Everyone wants to learn, from birth to death, from simple to complex learning, from elementary to sophisticated learning.

Deming (1990) wrote, "People are born with intrinsic motivation, self-esteem, dignity, curiosity to learn, joy in learning." He continued to write about how performing for someone else's approval destroys the motivation.

Whether motivation was destroyed at an early age or by personal activities, some United States citizens do not hold a high school diploma. Immigrants' lack of fluency in the English language may prevent them from obtaining a high school diploma.

In the State of Minnesota in the mid to late '80s the Governor, Rudy Perpich, wanted opportunity for all Minnesotans to have access to learning. Born into a poor family he often proclaimed that education lifted him from poverty; he wanted similar opportunity for his constituents. In addition to self-fulfillment Governor Perpich believed that an educated person is far more likely to be gainfully employed. The individual is then contributing to the economy rather than drawing from government sources (Randall, 1991).

In his 1985 Access to Excellence initiative for the Minnesota Legislature to consider, Governor Perpich proposed school choice as a

means of opening up different opportunities to kindergarten through grade 12 students. It was not until 1987 that this initiative became law.

Another choice program, under the umbrella of the High School Graduation Incentives Program (M.S. 126.22, 1988) passed by the Minnesota Legislature in 1988, provides incentives and encourages students who have experienced difficulty in the traditional educational system to complete their high school education in any one of several alternative ways. For example, persons over 21 years of age who have received fewer than 14 years of education beginning at age 5, have not completed requirements for a high school diploma, and are eligible for any program under the federal Jobs Training Partnership Act can enroll in the High School Graduation Incentives Program to work toward completing a high school education. Termed the Adult Diploma Program, qualified learners have up to two years of free state aid to finish their requirements.

High School Equivalent Programs

General Education Development (GED) programs have provided thousands of students who did not complete their high school education with opportunity to earn a high school equivalent certificate. This equivalent certificate, however, is not always regarded as valuable by students and employers. An alternative to the GED is to develop innovative programs such as the Adult High School Diploma program that enables adult students to earn a true high school diploma. Several

studies have been conducted to develop and evaluate this alternative program.

An evaluation of a nontraditional adult diploma program which allowed students to earn high school diplomas in St. Paul, Minnesota, was reported by Deegan (1981). The study was designed to determine program effectiveness as it was viewed by 40 graduate and present students. The findings were that the reasons the graduates decided to return to school to complete their high school program involved both a strong motivation to complete the diploma and a specific goal related to career entry, career advancement or further education; the primary attraction to the program was the opportunity to earn a diploma rather than an equivalency certificate; the graduates found out about the program primarily through bulletins or other literature from the school district and communication with others who were aware of the existence of such a program; graduates and current students were very positive about the impact of the program on their lives in the areas such as improvement of self-esteem, and understanding one's own abilities, skills and interests; and the graduates reported little help in the areas of parenting, health care and consumer economics.

In 1986, Pereira conducted a follow-up study of the graduates of an adult high school diploma program in Mira Costa, California, from the previous four years. The study found that the most frequent reasons for not continuing education were the need to earn money and

the high cost of education. The majority of graduates used the high school diploma to secure a job or get a promotion. The basic skills class and psychology were the most helpful classes.

Briney and Long (1985) studied the benefits of a short-term prevocational program for 19 economically disadvantaged adults through a telephone interview approach. Although the sample was not adult high school diploma students, the categorization of findings is helpful for research on students in any nontraditional program. The researcher intentionally searched for four anticipated benefits: economic (finding and keeping a job); educational (further schooling); personal (feelings of greater confidence, self-worth, ability to communicate); and social (membership in organizations, participation in community and government). The researcher found evidence in all four areas to support her expectation.

Program evaluation rather than assessment of students was the focus for Babayan (1983) in the study of high school equivalency programs in Washington State University. The study evaluated the effectiveness of the program through a survey of students and teachers with regard to their satisfaction with the program's effectiveness in six areas: instruction, recruitment, placement, counseling, residence living, and administration. The evaluations indicated a high degree of satisfaction with all the components. Recommendations for program improvement were also provided.

A group of 35 high school equivalency program students from seasonal farmworker background was used as a sample in Bores-Rangel et al. (1990) study on testing of Bandura's self-efficacy theory. The study examined occupational consideration as it related to self-efficacy, academic performance, interest, incentives, and satisfaction. The analyses of data indicated a moderate to strong relationship between the extent of occupational consideration and self-efficacy, interests, and incentives. Self-efficacy expectation for academic areas were moderately related to the accomplishment and ability, but not to effort, in those areas.

How the adult high school diploma program served migrant or seasonal workers has been the focus for other studies. Velazquez (1990) traced the history of the establishment of the High School Equivalency Program (HEP). The author believed that a program such as HEP offered far more supportive components than traditional GED programs. The author also suggested that the program should have a variable and a flexible delivery system and that tutoring, counseling, and access to culturally enriching opportunities be major components of the program.

Of the effective GED programs, the Family Development Center in Lafayette Courts on Baltimore's east side was one (Harrison, 1989). The center offered job training, health services, child care, and the chance to obtain a high school diploma. In 1988, 67% of the women who took the GED test passed it. That rate was 33% higher than the

average for students in the GED program operated by the Baltimore Board of Education. The keys to the success, according to teachers and students, were computer-assisted learning and caring teachers and staff. "For most of these students, working on the computer is the first positive experience they've had." Students were eager to learn because of the strong desire to get their diploma. "After all these years," one graduate said, "I want to do something with my life. I've never had a good job, but now I want to go to college. I'm tired of going nowhere."

Purpose of the Study

Although choice and expanded opportunity is touted as an effective way of delivering more effective educational programs, very little research has been conducted to support such concepts. The purpose of this study was to seek answers to the following questions about the Adult Diploma Program (ADP) as provided by the High School Graduation Incentives Program:

1. How did persons enrolled in ADP find out about ADP?
2. What factors led to making the decision to enroll in ADP?
3. What are the daily activities of learners enrolled in ADP?
4. What happened to persons after leaving the ADP?

Approach

The nature of the study and the methods of data collection drew heavily on qualitative research procedures. This method allows researchers to contextualize the experience of ADP participants, to utilize multiperspective data collection and data analysis, and to

provide rich accounts of ADP participants' experience. More specifically, by using a qualitative research method the researchers sought an understanding of ADP participants' experience within the intertwined context of their past education experience, their family, community, and the ADP program environment. The data were collected and cross-checked through various sources to assure the reliability of data. Multiple researchers engaged in data analysis, sought the opinions of concerned personnel in the program, and derived results from the consensus among researchers. All these strategies allowed the experience of ADP participants to be examined from multiperspectives. With the feature of contextualization and multiperspective, the questions of "why" and "how" pertained to ADP participants' experience could be best answered.

Setting and Participants

Purposive sampling is defined as a sampling procedure which requires the researcher to establish criteria necessary for individuals to be included in the investigation, and then find a sample that matches the criteria (Merriam, 1988). This study was a qualitative study of adults enrolled in the Adult Diploma Program working toward earning a high school diploma during the school year 1992-93. The purposefully selected sample of participants for this study was limited to the 15 adults enrolled in the Adult Diploma program.

Subjects

The subject population were learners over 21 years of age who had not completed their high school education and were enrolled in the Adult Diploma Program (ADP). In order to qualify for ADP locally, learners must be involved with the Stearns-Benton County Employment Opportunity Office and go to school full-time.

Of the 633 adults enrolled in CMALC classes in 1992-93, 130 students were in ESL programs, 102 students were in the ABE program, and 401 students were in diploma programs. Almost one-third (32%) of the students were 16-24 years old, 55% were 25-44 years old, 11% were 45-59, and 2% were 60 years old or over. More men (58%) than women (42%) were enrolled.

There were 70 students enrolled in the Adult Diploma Program, 40 men and 30 women. An intake interview with a member of the CMALC staff asks for educational, employment, family, and health histories. Then a copy of the adult learner's high school transcript is requested from his/her former high school from which CMALC staff determine the requirements remaining for graduation. These requirements are specified in the number of clock hours required to satisfy coursework in language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, physical education, health, and electives. After these have been agreed upon by the CMALC and the student's high school, the learner meets with an instructor and together they develop a personalized educational plan. This plan focuses on the specific

educational needs of individuals while taking into account their living situations outside of school. Once the personalized learning plan has been completed, learners attend individual or small-group instructional sessions with their assigned instructor. During the last school year, 15 adults earned a high school diploma.

Intake interviewers in the St. Cloud Public Schools identified students for this study. Fifteen adult students were interviewed.

Data Collection Procedure

In qualitative research, the researcher is the main instrument for data collection. The researchers in this study retained the intake interviewers in the Adult Diploma Program to collect data through tape recorded interviews. The intake interviewers were asked to collect the data by the researchers because it was felt the intake interviewers had established credibility with the adult students. The intake interviewers would be able to solicit cooperation of the adult students and more readily secure answers to the questions. The intake interviewers were given in-depth explanation of the nature and purpose of the study by Ruth Randall and Brian Bottge, researchers.

Interviews are tools for finding out what is someone else's mind. Qualitative literature supports the interview as one of the most important sources of collecting data in a naturalistic study (Burgess, 1984; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Spradley, 1979; Yin, 1989). The interview helps the researcher better understand the behaviors and feelings of the participants and helps to gain insights on how they interpret the world

around them (Merriam, 1988). Through qualitative interviews, participants can express their own understandings on their own terms and in their own words. Interviews allow the researcher to probe beyond actions to the meanings, values, and understandings within the particular context. Interviews such as these can help the researcher understand the behaviors and feelings of adult learners and gain insights on how they interpret the world around them.

Ordinary events become data when approached from a particular frame of mind, that of a researcher (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). The interview is a purposeful conversation in which descriptive data are gathered in the participant's own words. The interview is particularly important in developing insights into how the participants interpret a piece of the world. Data are the rough materials collected by the researcher, the particulars which form the basis of analysis.

Qualitative research has emerging qualities; the researcher does not know where the data will lead. The beginning of a qualitative study is used to focus the study based on the emerging realities. As a pilot study, three adult students were interviewed with a focused interview. Through these beginning interviews, the researchers reviewed the focus of the study and the interview questions. Pilot interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. The pilot study developed initial themes and provided further focus for the study.

Data Collection

The main data collection procedure was ethnographic interviews with learners currently enrolled in the Adult Diploma Program (ADP). These semi-structured, face-to-face interviews identified the culture of ADP participants and generated answers to the four questions of the study.

There are two main ethical issues when conducting research with human participants, informed consent and protecting participants from harm (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Erickson, 1986). Personal contacts were made with the adult students by the intake interviewers to request interviews. Participants were informed of the research interest and were asked for their permission to interview them and their consent to use the information in this study. The identities of the participants were always protected.

The participants were treated with respect and courtesy and their cooperation and permission was sought. Expressions of thanks were given to the participants after their interviews. Approval from appropriate authorities in Minnesota was acquired by Brian Bottge, researcher.

The researchers determined a set of questions for the interviews (Appendix A). The questions were then sent to a jury of five experts on adult education, choice, and school administration (Appendix B). Modifications were made to the four major questions as a result of jury suggestions.

Interviews were conducted with the intake staff of the Central Minnesota Adult Literacy Consortium to gain their perception of answers to the four questions posed to the students in the Adult Diploma Program. Interviews were also conducted with the St. Cloud Community Schools Superintendent and the St. Cloud Community Schools Community Education Director.

The written records of the adult learner's educational, employment, family, and health histories were perused for additional information. Student records which were examined were the intake form entitled "Central Minnesota Adult Literacy Program, 1991-92, Student Information" (Appendix C). Student information on the form included general, educational background, certificate/degree completed, employment history, family history, and health history.

Focused interviews were useful for obtaining comparable data across participants. The intake interviewers probed the respondents to be specific and asked for clarification.

Two of the researchers in this study completed independent analyses of some of the transcripts to confirm categories and emerging themes. Peer review was important in this study as a check on researcher bias and to verify that the results were consistent and dependable.

During the study the researchers contacted the intake interviewers to learn about what happened during the interview, the conversation and the environment for the interview (Bogdan &

Biklen, 1982). A tape recorder misses the sights, impressions and extra remarks which were noted when the researchers talked with the intake interviewers.

The researchers' notes of communication with one another and with the intake interviewers were introspective accounts of personal feelings during the research study. Personal biases of the researchers that may influence the study were noted. Researchers must articulate their own subjectivity because there is a tendency for the researcher's subjectivity to shape the study (Heisenberg, 1958; Peshkin, 1988).

Clarification of Researcher's Position, Role, and Biases

In qualitative research, the values of the researcher may have some effect on the study. For this study, the researchers' positions were:

1. Adults must feel a strong need to want to earn a high school diploma.
2. Intake interviewers can elicit information from adult students.
3. A role of the researchers is to inform the intake interviewers as to the nature and purpose of the study so they have a clear understanding of their role in the interviews.
4. The researchers' duty is to conduct research honestly and forthrightly.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed by using HyperQual computer program, version 4.0.

First, the transcriptions of the interview data on the diskettes were transferred into the program through the MAC built-in function of Scrapbook. An Xview-Stack containing the transcriptions was created for each informant.

Second, the Xview-Stacks were analyzed separately. Within each Xview-Stack, data were coded line by line. When an important piece of information was found, a code, also known as a tag in HyperQual, was attached to the information. Both the code and a copy of the information called exemplar were saved in a Tag-Stack that was created by the program when a tag command was issued. Each Tag-Stack contained all the codes and the corresponding exemplars for each interviewee. Data in all Xview-Stacks were coded twice. One piece of data might have more than one code if the data has multiple meanings. The comparison of the first code and the second code for each piece of information determined the final codes.

Third, all the Tag-Stacks were then merged into one Tag-Stack through the merge command provided by the program. The filter function in the Tag-Stack allowed the researcher to find all the codes with the same name and their exemplars, then stored them into another Tag-Stack called Theme-Stack. Several Theme-Stacks were generated and a theme was then generalized for each Theme-Stack.

The information from the interviews with the intake staff and from the educational, employment, family, and health histories was analyzed in conjunction with the information from the adult learners.

Reliability and Validity

In ensuring reliability and validity of the study the following strategies were employed:

1. Triangulation of data: Multiple resources were utilized to collect data, including interviews with learners, interviews with intake staff, and the documents on adult learner's educational, employment, family, and health histories.

2. Elimination of investigator (researcher) effect: To eliminate the effect due to the presence of a strange investigator, two intake people who were familiar to the adult learners worked as interviewers. These two intake people understood the nature and purpose of this qualitative study.

3. Elimination of selection bias: All students enrolled in the ADP program were the subjects of the study; this reduced the investigators' bias in selection of subjects.

4. Multiple investigators (researchers): Three investigators were involved in the study. Research procedure and results were counter-checked and agreed upon by all investigators.

Findings

Question 1: How did you find out about the Adult Diploma Program provided through High School Graduation Incentives?

The participants found out about the program through a variety of ways which fell into two categories: one-way communication and two-way communication. These two categories are widely used in communication science whereby one-way communication refers to information dissemination on one part and information reception on the other, and two-way communication involves dialogue between the information disseminator and recipient. Each of the two categories can then be classified as active or passive on the part of the information recipient.

Table 1

The Ways Participants Found Out About ADP

	One-way Communication	Two-way Communication
Passive	Flyers, newspapers, signs in the public library	Conversation with friends, relatives, and classmates
Active	Phone call	Conversation with program officer

Our data indicated that some participants found out about the program through the flyers and newspapers delivered to their door, and signs placed on the library walls. These exemplified the effort to reach out made by the school district, and passive information reception by participants. Some of the participants actively sought information by locating the telephone number in the phone book and made the phone call.

A significant percent of participants found out about the ADP program through conversation with their friends, relatives and classmates. For one participant, his brother was in the program and recommended it to him. For another, a probation officer was the informant. And for still another, he acquired the information from his classmates. When asked how he found out about he program, he said, "As I started in the school that's what everybody else was talking about—working on their diploma and everything, and so I started keeping track of the hours and stuff, too." In all these cases, conversations were initiated by non-participants.

In many cases in social activities, the decision process involves negotiation on both sides of the table, which requires two-way communication. In our study, some participants and the program officer engaged in discussion on the alternatives and chose the one that best suited the participants' situation. For one participant, he came to the program to get his GED. After looking at his record, the program officer suggested that it was easier for him to go for a high school diploma.

All these findings confirm the literature on this research question. In addressing the same research question, Deegan (1981) and his associates discovered that the graduates found out about the program primarily through bulletins or other literature from the school district and communication with others who were aware of the existence of such a program.

Question 2: What led you to make the decision to enroll in the Adult Diploma Program?

The acceptance of information depends initially upon the readiness of utilizing that information on the part of recipient. As noted, a good deal of effort is made by the school district to disseminate relevant information. Still a relatively small group enrolled in the program. A logical question for us was to inquire about the reasons that led participants to enroll in the program.

A relevant question is why the participants did not complete their high school education. The data offered a variety of explanations which can be classified as institutional or personal. By institutional we refer to the circumstantial conditions that are out of the individual's control. Some of the participants were from a rural area; the educational quality and accessibility to high school prevented them from getting the diploma. Lack of a special education program caused two participants, one was a gifted student and another was a disabled learner, to drop out of school. The gifted student recalled that he was so far ahead of his classmates that he was often either bored of classes or challenged the teacher. Thus, he was regarded as a trouble-maker and thrown out of school.

Two immigrants in the program had an identical reason. Their country was not able to provide adequate education for all children. Also, their families needed their help in the field to maintain their livelihood.

Personal reasons included leaving school for a job or being bored with school. The first one is congruent with the finding in the study by Pereira (1986) that the most frequent reasons for not continuing education were the need to earn money and the high cost of education. The unpleasant school experience was also a significant factor. Most participants thought that school was hard and boring. Teachers did not care or the school environment was bad. It is understandable that negative experiences would keep participants from attending school.

While the reasons for not completing high school vary considerably, the causes for the participants to enroll in the program are quite homogeneous. All except one stated that they did it for themselves. One participant affirmatively said, "I just decided I wanted to finish high school. I'm doing it for myself." Another participant pointed to his personality by saying that "I always knew that I would complete my diploma. I don't like to leave things unfinished. I like to finish what I start."

Only one participant enrolled in the program because his father wanted him to. His father had done everything possible to help him, asking nothing in return except hoping that he would obtain his high school diploma. The wish of his father led him to enroll in the program.

This "do-it-for-myself" motivation really served as a driving force for participants to overcome some of the barriers such as transportation, child care, and spouse's resistance. They were confident

of their ability to complete the program. They were less likely to get tired and bored of the program. One participant who had been in the program for the longest time declared, "I (will) keep going until I'm tired, but I'm not tired yet." When one was asked whether he had any other job or occupation that he might like to do at another time, he replied, "If I were to do something I would like to do more studying!" Another informant said, "I'll work on it whether the diploma is there or not. I mean, I work on it the same, but as long as I'm doing it, putting the hours in, I might as well go for the diploma, and even after I get that I still want to keep on working on learning." When asked if a diploma was his goal, he replied, "My real goal is education."

Literature revealed that the most important reason for adults to come back to school to get their high school diploma was career-related. Either the current job and promotion required it or a new job necessitated it (Deegan, 1981). In this study, a career goal played little role in their decision to enroll in the program. Only two students mentioned reasons that were job-related. One hoped that the diploma would prepare her to go to beauty college. Another indicated that his job required the diploma. More important to this group of individuals was to enhance the self-esteem. As one participant put it, "You know people degrade you for not having a diploma." The participant with a learning disability testified, "I guess all my life I couldn't figure out why other people could look at a word or spell a word and they could remember it and I couldn't. And I always knew there was something

wrong because I never knew I had a learning disability. But now (I'm) just going and wanting to learn."

Parenting was another reason. This characterizes one common feature of all adult learning programs such as ADP (Deegan, 1981; Pereira, 1986). Parents, especially mothers, come back to school not only to renew themselves but also to seek means to help their children. As one mother in the program said, "I wanted to be able to help my girls deal with their homework and stuff. Before that (attending the program) I couldn't really help them."

Modeling was the other reason that was similar to parenting; it needs to be singled out because it has not been identified in the literature. Participants wanted to set a positive model for their children showing that they were not quitters. One participant described the enjoyment and excitement to study together with her children and the positive impact of her persistency on her children.

Financial aid was probably the most important reason although only three participants referred to it explicitly. Without it most of participants wouldn't be able to attend the program. Qualified learners have up to two years of free state aid to meet requirements for the high school diploma.

Question 3: What are your daily activities in the Adult Diploma Program at school? Outside of school?

The hours and courses which a particular participant in ADP needs to take depend mainly upon his/her past school transcripts. The years

the informants had completed ranged from four to eleven. Some informants needed only to take some math and science courses while others' curriculum included social studies, English, math, science, history, and geography. Nevertheless, reading and computers seemed to be enjoyed by most of the informants. This is not surprising as one informant said, "It's relaxing because I spend most of my time here reading. I like working on the computer because there weren't computers when I was in school, so I enjoy that very much." But, for this group of informants, the novelty of the computer seemed to be the reason that got their attention. Research has shown that much more could be done to incorporate computers into adult learners' curriculum. The Family Development Center in Lafayette Courts (Harrison, 1989) on Baltimore's east side is one of many successful adult learning programs that employed computer-assisted learning as the primary instructional tool.

Reading was regarded as more important by others. One informant said, "Well, I did work on computers some, but I really still feel that reading is more important than the computer because if you can't read, a computer won't do you a lot of good." The importance the informants associated with reading really reflects the emphasis of most adult learning programs. A good proportion of students in ADP initially enrolled in the Adult Literacy Program which focused more on reading.

The researchers believe social interactions in an organization determine the experience of its participants. Social interactions in ADP comprise interaction between students and teachers and those among students. Almost all informants expressed great satisfaction about teachers. When asked what their opinions were about ADP, significant number of informants were quick to comment on the helpfulness of teachers. One participant said, "Teachers here are great. They are caring and really know how to teach." Adding to the considerateness of teachers was the one-to-one instructional method employed by teachers. Because the philosophy behind this method differs from traditional pedagogy in the way that individual differences are valued and purposefully attended, it is especially suitable for students in ADP where individual differences were more evident than in the regular student population.

The finding of a satisfactory relationship between teachers and participants and instruction does not differ from the literature. In a study that evaluated a High School Equivalency Program at Washington State University, Babayan (1983) surveyed students and teachers with regard to their satisfaction with the program's effectiveness in six areas: instruction, recruitment, placement, counseling, residence living, and administration. The study indicated a high degree of satisfaction with all the components.

To better understand informants' experience in the program, the researchers thought it was important to look at what they did outside

of school. Data embodied a great range of activities the informants engaged in outside of school. They enjoyed their leisure time, doing among other things, hunting, skating, riding, fishing, taking care of family, housekeeping, and partying. Three informants considered themselves as full time students. Homework took the majority of their leisure time. They even voluntarily asked for more homework. Once again, it shows the strong desire of students to study just for study itself, which leads us to conclude that adult students tend to study for the sake of knowledge rather than objective outcomes such as diploma.

Question 4: What experiences have you had since you received your diploma?

Since the participants had not graduated from the program when the interviews took place, information was not available to answer this question. Instead, we asked the participants how they thought their lives would be different after they got diploma. Most of them were uncertain about their future and what the diploma would do for them. The response from one informant reads like this, "Everybody always asks me, but I really don't know. I always tell everybody when I get out of school, you know, it depends where I get in school, you know, how smart I get or whatever." Although uncertainty prevails across the data, the informants did foresee the impacts of diploma on their lives. The data analysis discovered three categories: psychological impact, impact on job opportunity, and impact on further education.

Studies have shown that coming back to school and getting a diploma has a great psychological impact on an adult learner's life (Deegan, 1981; Briney & Long, 1985). Self-esteem is frequently found to be the most prominent influence of various kinds in adult learning programs. As discussed in the section of Question 2, some informants enrolled in the program because they felt that a diploma would put the missing part back to their lives and make them complete. A sense of security was also hoped to be achieved, as one informant said, "You will feel a little bit more secure, a little bit more to go on with what you want."

The connection between a diploma and intelligence was asserted by almost 35% of informants. "Smarter" was the other word that mentioned again and again by informants when they referred to what a diploma would do for them.

Although the informants did not know what would happen after they got their diploma, some of them did have a dream job that they wanted, and hoped the diploma would help make the dream come true. The dream jobs ranged from custodial to secretary to social worker to computer programmer. The diversity of dream jobs represents the diverse background of informants.

Further education was cited as the another impact the diploma would have. Some informants, especially the younger ones, really had a high aspiration of becoming professionals. All these professions require special training and post-secondary education. The diploma

provides an avenue to further education. One informant said, "After I get my diploma, well, I'd like to go on to school, — I'd go into computers or maybe CP (computer programmer) or something."

Interestingly, those intangible psychological impacts seemed more perceptible to informants than those tangible impacts such as jobs and further education. The informants were very assertive when talking about psychological impacts. One explanation is probably because their hopes for a future job and further education are mediated by a range of factors which are out of their control. They can, however, determine how a diploma would impact their own lives.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

This is a very heterogeneous group. The participants differ substantially in many demographic aspects as well as in the causes of not being able to complete their high school diploma. From the data emerged one theme that unifies them as a group. We refer to the finding that they are strongly determined, self-motivated, and eager to learn. Although getting the diploma is the momentum for most of the participants, the pure motivation of "study for study itself" permeates more deeply through their experience. It could be concluded that it is this pure motivation that distinguishes this group of adult learners form other student populations.

Generally, the participants are very positive about their ADP experience. Two aspects of their experience satisfy them most: one-to-one instructional strategy and teacher-participant relationship.

Several hypothesized explanations can be offered. First, psychologists posit that people's experiences are mediated by their expectations. The data showed that some of the participants dropped out of school because they were bored by the traditional organization of instructional content and pedagogy. Their expectations in terms of instructional methods were probably low. When they engaged in a one-to-one learning situation, they contrasted the advantage of this instructional method with their past negative experience, resulting in an overwhelming embrace of this new method. The same reasoning can be used for teacher-participant relationships although the dynamics of a relationship between teacher and adult learner is an interesting topic worthy of exploration in future study.

From the personnel policy point of view, the findings justified the decision in selecting ADP teachers as a sound one. For future hiring policy, the requirements for the ADP teaching position need to include experience and effectiveness to employ one-to-one instructional strategy, and the understanding of dynamics of teacher-participant relationship.

In an interview with James O'Hanlon, Dean of Teachers College at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Don Walton writes in the January 17, 1990, The Lincoln Star, quoting O'Hanlon as saying, "Our nation recognizes that we need to improve our schools. That says we need to turn out better teachers. Demands on teachers are increasing. It's a lot tougher teaching now. So, we've got to do a better job" (p. 11).

Superintendents need to recruit the kind of teachers who can best work with adult learners.

The benefits of ADP experience could not be tapped in this study. But we should not underestimate the impacts of this experience, both psychological and practical. We don't need to cite the successful drop-out scientists, businessmen, or politicians in human history to justify our commitment to such adult education programs as this one. These findings reveal a highly expected outcome from the ADP experience. Continued efforts and resources need to be devoted to help thousands of people to realize their dreams that otherwise are impossible.

We agree that our society has already been informationalized. The development in means of information dissemination enhances our ability to communicate. But the findings of this study showed that one-way communication was utilized more often than two-way communication. The advantages of two-way communication were not recognized or ignored. The demographic background often was not taken into consideration. Some researchers have observed that in low-income areas of a school district, communication may be through individuals representing ministerial alliances or churches, community health services, human services staff, or other agencies which serve the potential students who live there (Randall, 1993). Effort and resources should continue to be used to recruit more students into the program.

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Appendix A

QUESTIONNAIRE

ADULT DIPLOMA PROGRAM

1. How did you find out about the Adult Diploma Program provided through High School Graduate Incentives?

2. What led you to make the decision to enroll in the Adult Diploma Program?

3. What are your daily activities in the Adult Diploma Program at school? outside of school?

4. What experiences have you had since you received your diploma?

Appendix B

Jury of Experts on Adult Education,
Choice, and School Administration

Joleen Durken, Manager
Community Education-Learner Services
Minnesota Department of Education
St. Paul, Minnesota 55101

Peggy Hunter, Specialist
Community Education-Learner Services
Minnesota Department of Education
St. Paul, Minnesota 55101

Joe Nathan, Senior Fellow
Hubert H. Humphrey Institute
University of Minnesota
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455

Robert J. Wedl, Special Assignment
Special Education
Minnesota Department of Education
St. Paul, Minnesota 55101

James R. Walker, Superintendent
North Branch Public Schools
North Branch, Minnesota 55056

Appendix C

Intake By: _____

CENTRAL MINNESOTA ADULT LITERACY PROGRAM
ST. CLOUD PROGRAM
1992-1993
STUDENT INFORMATION

Date: ____/____/____

S.S.#: _____

PROGRAM REFERRAL

___ ABE Classroom
___ Brush-up
___ Diploma
___ ESL/Citizenship
___ GED Classroom
___ GED Pre-Test
___ GED/Seniors
___ Family Literacy (PACE)
___ L.D. (Learning Disabled)
___ QRC
___ Tutor/Volunteer
___ Vocational Rehabilitation
___ Workplace
___ Other _____

RELEASE/AGENCY	__Y	__N
RELEASE/LITERACY	__Y	__N
RELEASE/PRE-GED TEST SCR	__Y	__N
RELEASE/DIPLOMA	__Y	__N

How did you find out about our program?

_____
_____
_____

SPECIAL INFORMATION (Needs/Barriers)

___ Career Information
___ Child Care
___ Driver's License
___ Library Card
___ Parenting
___ Preschool Program
___ Transportation
___ Veteran
___ Voter Registration
___ Work Readiness
___ Other _____
_____

A. GENERAL

D.O.B. ___/___/___ AGE: _____ SEX: (F) (M) SECOND LANGUAGE _____ (Y) (N)

1. Name _____
(LAST) (FIRST) (MIDDLE) (MAIDEN)

2. Spouse(or significant other) _____
(LAST) (FIRST)

3. Mailing Address: _____

4. _____
(CITY) (STATE) (ZIP)

5. PHONE
Home #: _____
Message #: _____

6. Has Driver's License (Y) (N)

B. EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

1. Last Year in School (19__ __)
2. No. Years of School (completed) _____
3. Attendance in Special Ed. class ___ Y ___ N

C. CERTIFICATE/DEGREE COMPLETED

1. High School Diploma (Y) (N)
2. GED (Y) (N)
3. Vocational _____ (Y) (N)
4. College _____ (Y) (N)

D. EDUCATIONAL HISTORY

1. Where did you go to school, K-12, etc. _____
_____

2. What was school like for you: _____
_____

3. Reading materials used now: _____
_____

4. Special Interests: _____
_____

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E. EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

1. Are you now employed: ___Y ___N 2. What do you do: _____

3. Employer: _____ How long: _____

4. Where: _____

5. Is reading needed on your job: ___Y ___N 6. What kind: _____

7. Do you have a job/occupation that you would like to do: ___Y ___N

If yes, what is it: _____

8. Comments: _____

_____

F. FAMILY HISTORY

1. Number and ages of children in your family now:

_____ _____ _____ _____

2. How do (did) your children feel about school and reading: _____

3. Comments: _____

_____

G. HEALTH HISTORY

1. Are you basically healthy: ____Y ____N

2. Are you currently taking medication: ____Y ____N

Comments: _____

3. Have you received any kind of counseling: _____

If so, what kind: _____

4. Counseling Agency: _____ Phone No: _____

Address: _____ City: _____ State: ___ Zip: ____

5. Counselor's name: _____ Phone No: _____

6. Comments: _____

_____

H. COMMENTS: _____

_____

_____

_____

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MINNESOTA LEGISLATION ON CHOICE: A STUDY OF LEARNERS IN THE ST. CLOUD, MINNESOTA, ADULT DIPLOMA PROGRAM

PRESENTATION AT 1993 CONFERENCE-WITHIN-A-CONVENTION
AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS
February 11, 1993

by

Dr. Ruth E. Randall
Associate Dean and Professor
Teachers College
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

and

Dr. Brian Bottge
Coordinator of Assessment Services
St. Cloud Community Schools
St. Cloud, Minnesota

Minnesota Legislation on Choice: A Study of Learners in the St. Cloud, Minnesota Adult Diploma Program

A Research Study by Dr. Ruth E. Randall, Associate Dean and Professor, Teachers College, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and Dr. Brian Bottge, Coordinator of Assessment Services, St. Cloud Community Schools, St. Cloud, Minnesota, and Han Hua Wang, Graduate Student, Department of Educational Administration, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

The State of Minnesota has been a forerunner in granting students expanded opportunities for enrolling in programs they wish to attend. One of these programs, under the umbrella of the High School Graduation Incentives Program (M.S. 126.22) passed by the Minnesota Legislature in 1988, provides incentives and encourages students who have experienced difficulty in the traditional educational system to complete their high school education in any one of several alternative ways. For example, persons over 21 years of age who have received fewer than 14 years of education beginning at age 5, have not completed requirements for a high school diploma, and are eligible for any program under the federal Jobs Training Partnership Act are eligible to enroll in the High School Graduation Incentives Program to work toward completing a high school education. Termed the Adult Diploma Program, qualified learners have up to two years of free state aid to finish their requirements.

Method

Adult Diploma Program

The Adult Diploma Program constitutes one of several educational programs offered by the Central Minnesota Adult Literacy Consortium

(CMALC). The CMALC consists of Community Education Services Departments of 16 school districts in the St. Cloud, Minnesota area and is dedicated to meeting the educational needs of adults. Adults may choose among several daytime and evening individualized programs to improve basic literacy skills (Adult Basic Education), classes to develop English proficiency for adults whose first language is not English (ESL), and two diploma programs. One diploma program grants a General Educational Development (GED) certificate, an equivalency diploma recognized by the Minnesota Department of Education. The GED is obtained by passing five basic skill tests. Adults enrolled in the Adult Diploma Program (ADP) can obtain a High School Diploma from their former high school by fulfilling the unmet requirements from their home high school.

Although choice and expanded opportunity is touted as an effective way of delivering more effective educational programs, very little research has been conducted to support such concepts. The purpose of this study was to seek answers to the following questions about the Adult Diploma Program (ADP) as provided by the High School Graduation Incentives Program:

1. How did persons enrolled in ADP find out about ADP?
2. What factors led to making the decision to enroll in ADP?
3. What are the daily activities of learners enrolled in ADP?
4. What happened to persons after leaving the ADP?

Approach

The nature of the study and the methods of data collection draw heavily on qualitative research procedures.

The main data collection procedure was ethnographic interviews with learners currently enrolled in the Adult Diploma Program (ADP). These semi-structured, face-to-face interviews identified the culture of ADP participants and generated answers to the questions posed above.

Subjects

The subject population were learners over 21 years of age who had not completed their high school education and were enrolled in the Adult Diploma Program (ADP). In order to qualify for ADP locally, learners must be involved with the Stearns-Benton County Employment Opportunity Office and go to school full-time.

Of the 633 adults enrolled in CMALC classes in 1992-93, 130 students were in ESL programs, 102 students were in the ABE program, and 401 students were in diploma programs. Almost one-third (32%) of the students were 16-24 years old, 55% were 25-44 years old, 11% were 45-59, and 2% were 60 years old or over. More men (58%) than women (42%) were enrolled.

There were 70 students enrolled in the Adult Diploma Program, 40 men and 30 women. After an intake interview with a member of the CMALC staff that asks for educational, employment, family, and health histories, a copy of the adult learner's high school transcript is requested from his/her former high school from which CMALC staff determine the requirements remaining for graduation. These requirements are specified in the number of clock hours required to satisfy coursework in language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, physical education, health, and electives. After these have been agreed upon by the CMALC and the student's high

school, the learner meets with an instructor and together they develop a personalized educational plan. This plan focuses on the specific educational needs of individuals while taking into account their living situations outside of school. Once the personalized learning plan has been completed, learners attend individual or small-group instructional sessions with their assigned instructor. During the last school year, 15 adults earned a high school diploma.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed by using HyperQual computer program, version 4.0.

First, the transcriptions of the interview data on the diskettes were transferred into the program through the MAC built-in function of Scrapbook. An Xview-Stack containing the transcriptions was created for each informant.

Second, the Xview-Stacks were analyzed separately. Within each Xview-Stack, data were coded line by line. When an important piece of information was found, a code, also known as a "tag" in HyperQual, was attached to the information. Both the code and a copy of the information called "exemplar" were saved in a Tag-Stack that was created by the program when a "tag" command was issued. Each Tag-Stack contained all the codes and the corresponding "exemplars" for each interviewee. Data in all Xview-Stacks were coded twice. One piece of data might have more than one code if the data has multiple meanings. The comparison of the first codes and the second codes for each piece of information determined the final codes.

Third, all the Tag-Stacks were then merged into one Tag-Stack through the "merge" command provided by the program. The "filter" function in the Tag-Stack allowed the researcher to find all the codes with the same name and their "exemplars," then stored them into another Tag-Stack called Theme-Stack. Several Theme-Stacks were generated and a theme was then generalized for each Theme-Stack.

Preliminary Findings

Preliminary findings indicate responses to the research questions were as follows.

Research Question 1: Students found out about the Adult Diploma Program (ADP) in a variety of ways, including community education, friends enrolled in the program, and through a flyer in the mail.

Research Question 2: Students decided to enter the program because of desire to finish high school, desire to get a better job, and desire to help their own children learn.

Research Question 3: Students reported activities in the program including reading, working on the computer, writing, doing math, and studying geography.

Research Question 4: Students interviewed had just received their diploma so could not answer this question.

Preliminary Conclusions

Preliminary conclusions are that a variety of ways of communication provide information to people interested in getting a high school diploma, that people have strong personal motivations to get a high school diploma, that activities in an Adult Diploma Program (ADP) resemble those in a

traditional high school, and that more time must elapse after receiving the high school diploma before people see a change in their lives.

Preliminary Recommendations

Recommendations are that the study should involve more students at the St. Cloud site and students at other sites. The study should also be conducted over a period of several years so that longitudinal data can be collected for administrators and policymakers to use in making decisions about Adult Diploma Programs.